

June 09, 2005- Congressman Rahall Works to Finalize Highway Bill

CONGRESSMAN RAHALL WORKS TO FINALIZE HIGHWAY BILL

WASHINGTON, DC - With his seniority on the House Transportation Committee and his significant experience in crafting transportation bills, U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) and other House and Senate conference committee members began work to iron out differences in the two versions of the new federal highway bill, which recently passed the House and Senate respectively by overwhelming bipartisan majorities.

"There is a great creaking sound reverberating throughout our land - it is the moans and groans of an aging infrastructure, often filled beyond capacity, straining for growth and progress," said Rahall. "Our infrastructure is nothing less than the lifeline of our Nation's economic wealth. It is our first line of national defense, the front line of our homeland security."

"Every Member of Congress knows this, the American people know this, and I believe the President in his heart knows this," said Rahall. "Let our work be driven from division and center on consensus. It is time again in America to let the dirt fly."

Through his seniority on the Transportation Committee, Rahall was able to secure \$2.3 billion for West Virginia in the House version of the federal highway bill, and millions of additional funds earmarked for transportation initiatives throughout southern West Virginia. Rahall noted, "The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that for every \$1 billion spent on transportation nationally, 47,500 new jobs are created. And these jobs are good jobs, good-paying jobs that West Virginia needs."

The \$2.3 billion for West Virginia will allow the State to make significant progress in improving its transportation infrastructure, including several high-priority construction projects. Rahall said, "Investment in transportation puts people to work and brings economic development opportunities to communities that need them and we need them in southern West Virginia."

"This bill will bring to life one of the best investments we make in West Virginia," Rahall said. "Every tax dollar West Virginians pay at the pump would return \$1.65 to the State in the House passed bill, and we expect that money to be put to work making our roads and bridges safer, to be used building new highways and putting West Virginians to work."

Rahall also stressed that a long-term highway bill is long overdue, saying, "Federal Highway program funding has been on the table for the last couple years. The bill has been stalled previously due to infighting in the Republican Party, leading us to pass short term extensions time and again. We must unite, both within and between our political parties, to get this bill completed before the current extension expires at the end of the month."

The current short term funding extension of the last highway bill expires on June 30, 2005. Rahall and the rest of the conference committee will meet for the first time this afternoon, giving them 3 weeks to strike a compromise, pass the bill in both chambers of Congress and bring it to the President's desk for signature.

Congressman Rahall is a national leader in the development of federal highway and transit legislation, and a veteran of every federal highway bill since coming to Congress. Rahall was a key architect in the previous highway bill passed seven years ago.

The White House has recently threatened to veto the highway bill. Rahall stressed that this is not a bill with which to play politics, saying, "This bill has wide bipartisan support because our Nation needs the funding for highway projects. We have laid the groundwork and have a great base on which to build, and my colleagues and I will craft a good bill, which is good for America and good for West Virginia. I urge the President to sign the final bill we agree on to let the rubber hit the road and help me create jobs for West Virginians."

Congressman Rahall at the start of today's conference committee meeting on the highway bill with Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY).